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FM IRAN RPO DUBAI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0270
INFO RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
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RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 IRAN RPO DUBAI 000026

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 5/1/2018
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SUBJECT: AHMADINEJAD AT ODDS WITH MAJLES SPEAKER

REF: RPO DUBAI 0003

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CLASSIFIED BY: Ramin Asgard, Acting Director, Iran Regional
Presence Office, DoS.
REASON: 1.4 (d)

1.(C) Summary: Conflicts between President Ahmadinejad and Majles speaker Haddad-Adel flared again when Iranian news published a scathing letter from the president to the speaker April 21 accusing him of violating the constitution. This follows other public battles this year between the president and the legislature on issues including the government budget. This latest dispute led to a comment by Supreme Leader Khamenei April 23 calling on government officials to avoid clashes and fault-finding. This conflict may be important in light of the 2009 presidential election, as there is speculation that Haddad-Adel will throw his hat in the ring. Both Ahmadinejad and Haddad-Adel are considered to have the support of Supreme Leader Khamenei, but if Haddad-Adel does have presidential aspirations, then Khamenei may be obliged to choose between the two men. However, there is no clear indication as yet that Ahmadinejad has lost Khamenei's support, despite the widespread criticism of the president's economic performance. End summary.

Ahmadinejad in public clash with Haddad-Adel

2.(U) The periodic political scuffles between President Ahmadinejad and Majles speaker Gholam Ali Haddad-Adel reached new levels April 21 when Iranian press published a scathing letter from Ahmadinejad to Haddad-Adel accusing him of "illegal actions" and violating the constitution. The basis of Ahmadinejad's complaints was Haddad-Adel's order to publish in the Majles Official Register the texts of some recent bills that had been voted into law by the Majles, but which the president had reportedly refused to implement. Publication in the official register obligates the government to implement the law within 15 days. According to the text of the letter published by domestic news outlet ISNA, Ahmadinejad wrote, "Who is responsible for these allegations and allowing the president's enemies to attack him? Who should investigate your wrongdoings? And how can this damage be compensated? How can ignorance toward and breach of the country's constitution by the Majles speaker be justified and explained? Is this not classed as a serious blow against the country's legislative system?" The

letter was published by several newspapers, but state-run television and radio did not report on the letter at all, for which they were criticized by a website close to the president.

3.(U) Haddad-Adel responded to the harsh public attack with a public letter of his own, defending himself and charging that the economic troubles facing the country are more important than Ahmadinejad's complaints in the letter. The reformist Aftab-e-Yazd newspaper published the full text of Haddad-Adel's letter, which cited the constitutional obligation of the parliament speaker to ensure that the laws passed by the Majles are published in the official register. Haddad-Adel called the tone of Ahmadinejad's letter "unsuitable" and that he did not intend to reply in the same tone. The letter stated, "Dr. Ahmadinejad, you may be sure that most representatives and I personally intend as we have in the past to collaborate with and back Your Excellency's government...At the same time, the law has set certain duties both for the president and the speaker and members of parliament, and these must be done...People have greater and more important problems, the most important of which today are prices, inflation, and the very sharp rise in housing prices, as Your Excellency is well aware. People expect parliament and the government to work together and find ways to resolve the economic problems of more deprived sectors, not confront each other at the provocation of politicians and political currents."

4.(U) The public disagreements between Ahmadinejad and Haddad-Adel first made national and international news in January 2008, over the issue of the government budget (reftel). The Majles passed a law in January requiring the government to supply gas to northern cities in Iran that were affected by unusually harsh winter storms. Ahmadinejad not only refused to implement the law, but in a letter to Haddad-Adel called it unconstitutional. A frustrated Haddad-Adel read Ahmadinejad's letter in front of the Majles, and asserted (accurately) that it is the role of the Guardian Council, not the president, to determine the constitutionality of Majles laws.

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Supreme Leader mediates

5.(U) To resolve the budget dispute in January, Haddad-Adel appealed for mediation to Supreme Leader Khamenei, who issued a somewhat vaguely worded statement that was interpreted as supporting Haddad-Adel's position. "All the legal ratifications that have undergone the process specified in the constitution are binding for all branches of government," Khamenei stated. This latest dispute in April between Ahmadinejad and Haddad-Adel also led to a comment by Supreme Leader Khamenei--who generally prefers to stay above the political fray, at least publicly--calling on government officials to avoid clashes. "We and the Iranian people should act in a manner that would urge officials of the country to work together in a harmonious manner, and to avoid differences, disputes, clashes and fault-finding among themselves," Khamenei said in an April 23 speech that focused on other issues.

6.(C) Comment: There is much speculation that Haddad-Adel is planning to challenge Ahmadinejad for the presidency in the 2009 election, and these public disagreements serve to differentiate Haddad-Adel from the president and his failing economic policies. However, the key issue is the support of the Supreme Leader. Both Ahmadinejad and Haddad-Adel are considered to have Khamenei's support, but if Haddad-Adel does have presidential aspirations, then Khamenei may be obliged to choose between the two men. However, there is no clear indication as yet that Ahmadinejad has lost Khamenei's support, despite the widespread criticism of the president's economic performance.

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